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United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle WA 98101

Alaska
Idaho
Oregon
Washington

Office of Ecosystems and Communities

April 2003

Connecting With Communities

Place-Based Approach Achieves Results

Place-Based Staff Take Action In Critical Areas

To learn more about place-based projects, contact the individuals listed on page two. To learn more about EPA visit:

http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/

To reach Region 10 Seattle staff via our toll-free line, call 1-800-424-4372

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2002 Listening Tour Place-Based Staff Hear EPA Program Needs

In 2002, place-based staff conducted a listening tour inside EPA Region 10 to work more effectively with Regional program offices. A week of meetings in Seattle with EPA staff from the offices of air quality, water, regional council, environmental cleanup, and others helped place-based staff pinpoint areas for collaboration and action. As follow-up, place-based staff have:

Worked with the Office of Air Quality and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) "SWAT" team to provide information on children's health, smoke, lead, and indoor air quality to schools, daycare centers, and Master Home Environmentalist volunteers.

Assisted the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) team by providing local contacts and information about significant federal projects in their geographic area and providing technical assistance and review on projects in the environmental review process.

Collaborated with Region 10's TMDL workgroups to meet the many requirements of TMDLs throughout EPA Region 10.

Increased communications with compliance and enforcement programs.

Worked with the Regional Endangered Species Act team to streamline consultation on projects that involve EPA and other federal agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Worked with the Region's forest team, focusing on implementing the Northwest forest plan, the Blue Mountain demonstration area, and restoring habitat on both federal and non-federal lands.

Continued to work closely with the Office of Air Quality on health advisories, air quality monitoring, reliable forecasting, and coordination among multiple smoke sources to reduce impacts on human health.

Led extensive post-award monitoring reviews of tribal grants from numerous EPA programs in cooperation with the Grants Administration Unit.

Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 10 is using a unique approach to achieve environmental results – we have stationed several EPA staff away from our regional hub in Seattle to manage projects at the grassroots community level. These "place-based" staff work in the cities and towns where critical environmental needs exist. Says Elbert Moore, former director of EPA's Office of Ecosystems and Communities, "EPA can only do so much from regional offices – we must be connected to geographic areas to be truly relevant." Citizens, tribes, and state and local agencies couldn't agree more. They report that place-based staff deliver valuable results that would not take place without EPA's presence at the local level.

Because place-based staff live and work in communities, they gain access and insight and can more easily:

- Work directly with citizens to achieve specific environmental results
- Collaborate with tribes and state governments to develop realistic solutions
- Gain an intimate understanding of community needs
- Feed information to EPA program offices so well-informed decisions are made
- Develop long-term, trusting relationships
- Visit residents, door-to-door, to talk about issues

A day in the life of a place-based staffer includes involvement in multiple issues and aligning EPA programs with community needs. Following is a sampling of projects where place-based staff are working closely with EPA "base programs" (air, water, pesticides, and cleanup) to accomplish Region 10 goals and priorities. These snapshots do not capture all place-based work, but highlight some recent projects. The sum of Region 10's place-based projects is a powerful part of our work to protect human health and the environment.

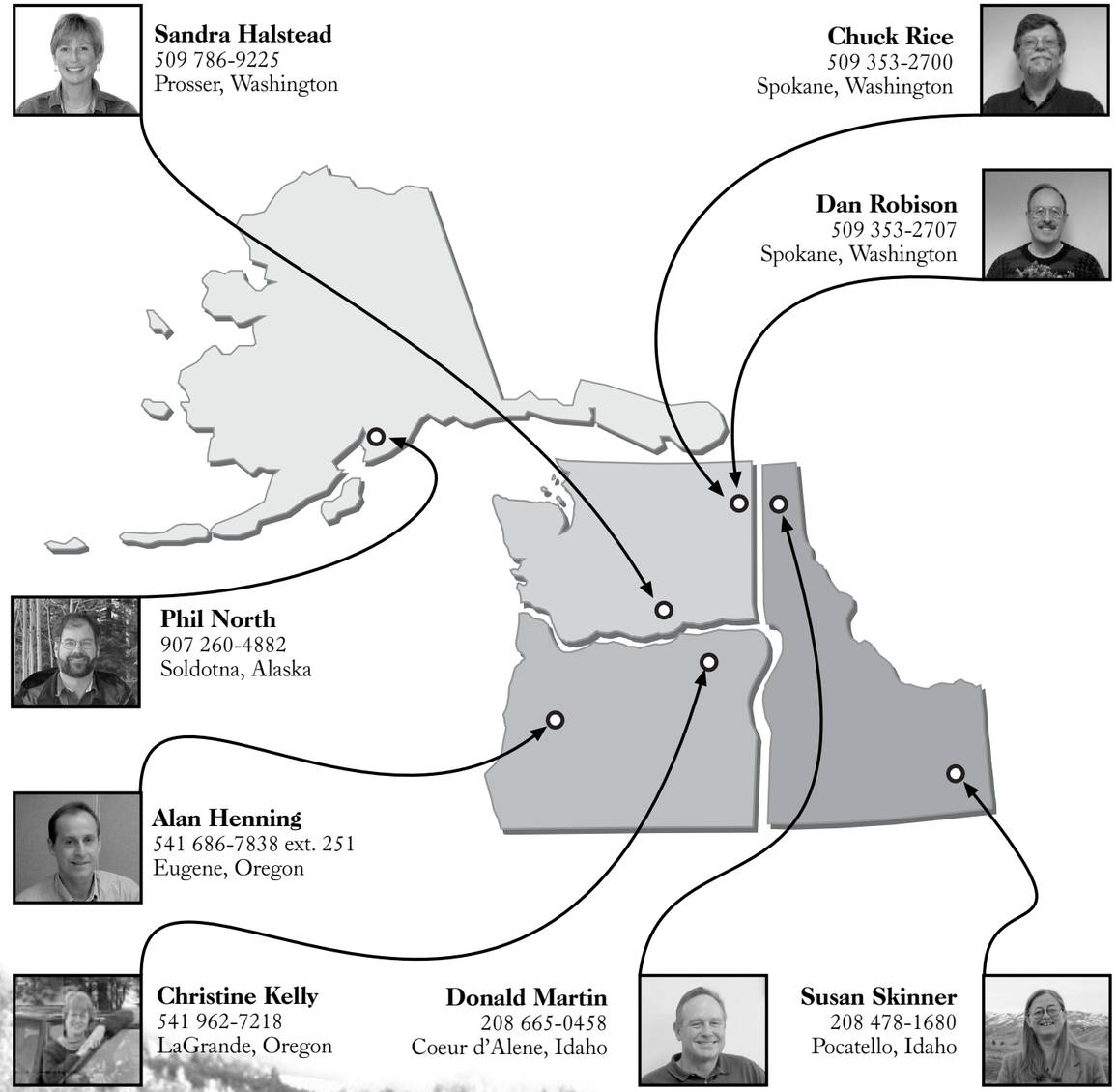
"Because place-based staff live and work in communities, they understand local concerns, and can craft realistic solutions. Place-based staff are well-positioned to meet critical needs."

Jared Rubin,
Willamette Basin Coordinator
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

"The Place-based Program is well worth it – staff in communities who are connected back to the EPA Regional Office are extremely valuable. They have done an outstanding job meeting community needs."

Ronald Kreizenbeck,
Deputy Regional Administrator
EPA Region 10

Place-Based Staff Are Positioned To Meet Critical Needs



Sandra Halstead
509 786-9225
Prosser, Washington

Chuck Rice
509 353-2700
Spokane, Washington

Dan Robison
509 353-2707
Spokane, Washington

Phil North
907 260-4882
Soldotna, Alaska

Alan Henning
541 686-7838 ext. 251
Eugene, Oregon

Christine Kelly
541 962-7218
LaGrande, Oregon

Donald Martin
208 665-0458
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Susan Skinner
208 478-1680
Pocatello, Idaho

Meeting Water Quality Standards

From Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, Don Martin manages EPA's team to help Oregon and Idaho develop the Snake River-Hells Canyon TMDL. A TMDL establishes allowable loadings or other parameters for a water body. Martin works with local tribes and state staff to approach the TMDL from an ecosystem perspective. Planned for completion in Spring 2003, the TMDL will ensure that more than 200 miles of the Snake River meet water quality standards and that beneficial uses, such as swimming, boating, public/private water supply, and salmonid spawning and rearing are restored. Martin is also assisting EPA staff in developing a TMDL for temperature for the Lower Snake River-Columbia River. On this project, he coordinates with state staff in Oregon and Washington.

Protecting Endangered Species

Martin also serves as EPA's salmon and trout expert on fisheries issues east of the Cascade Mountains. He serves as an information bridge between EPA policy makers and federal, private, and university research scientists, as well as providing technical and policy expertise. His efforts are contributing to development and implementation of recovery plans for Snake River Chinook Salmon, Sockeye Salmon, and Steelhead and Bull Trout. Martin's work will help restore and protect threatened or endangered anadromous and resident salmonid species in waters of the interior Columbia River basin.

Don Martin's contributions to Snake River TMDLs will ensure that more than 200 river miles meet water quality and temperature standards.

"Place-based staff understand the mood and economy of a community. I see opportunity for place-based staff to help us distribute information on children's health and identify compliance assistance needs."

Montel Livingston,
Unit Manager
Office of Waste and
Chemicals Management

Teaching People About Indoor Air Quality

This past year, in the Yakima Valley and cities across Washington, Dan Robison taught health districts, childcare providers, rural nurses, and low-income communities about indoor air quality. Working with the American Lung Association of Washington (ALAW), Robison helped people reduce asthma triggers and protect their children from dust and mold. "Dan Robison is all about partnership and sharing resources," says Leslie Benoit, ALAW Regional Director. "He has dramatically improved our Little Lungs Breathing educational program." The Association says its workshops lead to fewer emergency room visits and prevention of severe asthma attacks.

Growing Healthy Forests

In an entirely different area, Robison has worked to improve forest management. He advocates prescribed burning and thinning to reduce the risk of catastrophic fires and increase growth of healthy forests. A few years ago, Robison started a pilot project on 20,000 acres in the Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest. The project took off and is now self-sustaining with citizens and environmental groups actively participating. The U.S. Forest Service is excited about this work and hopes to see similar projects in other areas.

The left side of this photo shows what a forest looks like after 70 years of fire exclusion; the right side shows how the forest should look in order to reduce catastrophic fires.

"We achieve stronger environmental outcomes when EPA place-based staff are involved."

Leslie Benoit,
Regional Director
American Lung Association
of Washington

Promoting Pesticide Alternatives

Sandra Halstead manages several projects in Washington's Yakima Valley and across Oregon and Idaho to promote safe pesticide alternatives and protect public health. This past year, as part of EPA's Strategic Agricultural Initiative, Halstead initiated six agricultural partnerships, which will reduce use of toxic pesticides from 20 to 60 percent on some farms. This is part of EPA's work to transition from harmful broad-spectrum pesticides to safer alternatives.

Says Halstead, "To do my job, I must be trusted by the community – it would be hard to do this work from an urban city." Halstead says her ability to meet with extension agents, farmers and others helps her get the job done. Art Linton, Assistant Dean of the College of Agriculture and Home Economics at Washington State University, agrees, "Halstead has made EPA highly relevant out here. The perception of EPA has changed considerably – because people see Halstead frequently, they feel more comfortable working with her."

Interns funded through an EPA grant discuss pesticide safety with Yakima Valley residents.

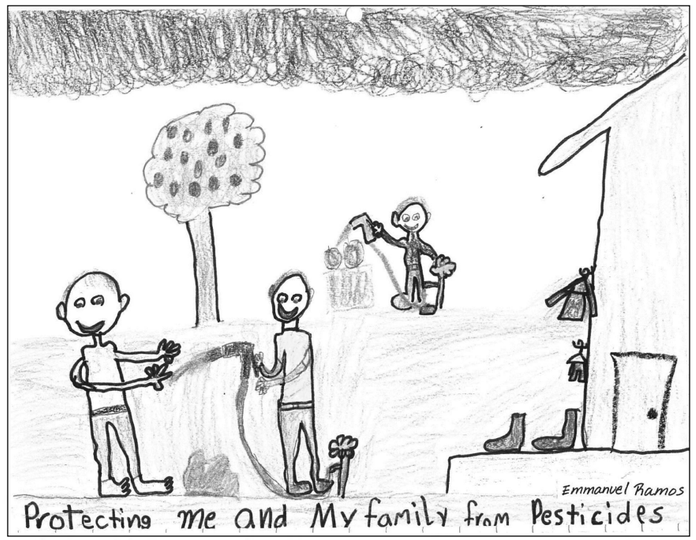
"Place-based staff nip simple mis-communications in the bud. They have great potential to assist with children's health issues, Brownfields, and site redevelopment."

Rick Albright,
Director
Office of Waste and Chemicals Management

Protecting Children's Health

Sandra Halstead's presence in the community has also led to success on the "For Healthy Kids!" project, which teaches farm workers how to keep pesticide residues out of their homes. By breaking the "take home" exposure pathway, "For Healthy Kids!" prevents both acute symptoms and irreversible developmental damage that can result when children are over-exposed to pesticides. Halstead's prevention work means that children of farm workers will be healthier and mature to their full potential.

This past year, Halstead was active on a community advisory board and distributed more than 3,000 Spanish-language booklets on worker protection. In addition, due to Halstead's efforts, twelve communities in the Yakima Valley benefited from radio broadcasts, school programs, health fairs, and neighborhood block parties on pesticide safety.



The "For Healthy Kids!" project teaches fourth-graders how to protect themselves from pesticides.

Protecting Aquatic Resources

On the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska, Phil North plays a key role in protecting aquatic resources. During the past year, he worked with the University of Alaska and the Kenai Watershed Forum to begin developing a wetlands geographic information system (GIS). It enables users to quickly identify how site use and development influence fish habitat, water quality, groundwater movement and more. Once completed, tribal, state, and local governments will use the system to determine impacts of environmental violations and develop wetland mitigation measures. Landowners will use the system to find out how future site use affects aquatic resources. By answering critical questions, the wetlands GIS will enable people to make the most of site use while preserving critical habitat.

"The vision provided by Phil North has been the driving force for the wetlands GIS," says Keith Boggs, Program Manager for the Alaska National Heritage Program at the University of Alaska. "North brought in our stakeholders – municipalities, tribes, the Kenai Wildlife Refuge, and federal agencies, and asked what was needed in the final product. His rational, down-to-earth approach was appreciated."

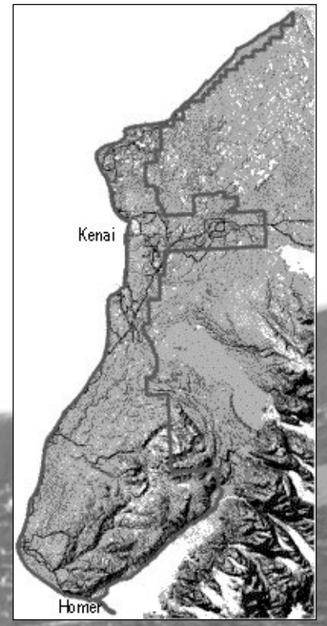
Furthering Wetlands Enforcement

The credibility of the Wetlands Program in Region 10 depends on an effective enforcement program. Phil North plays an active role in inspecting wetlands on the Kenai Peninsula. His field presence and real-time responses to citizen complaints are critical in assisting EPA and Department of Justice attorneys and enforcement staff. This past year, he was involved in a series of cases with repeat and recalcitrant violators. One case is being prosecuted by the Department of Justice and is likely to go to court this year, while another will go to hearing with an administrative law judge. This work will result in penalties and restoration of sensitive habitats. As the Wetlands Program moves forward in prosecuting cases, potential violators will be deterred from violations.

"EPA staff must be near certain projects to understand cultural issues and unique landscapes – Seattle is flat-out too far away."

Keith Boggs,
Program Manager
Alaska Natural Heritage Program, University of Alaska

The Wetlands Geographic Information System answers critical questions that enable citizens and government to preserve habitat.



State staff sign the Montana-Idaho Border Agreement to control nutrient loading in Lake Pend Oreille.

Reaching Cross-Border Agreements

In Sandpoint, Idaho, Chuck Rice is helping establish an overall nutrient management plan for Lake Pend Oreille. He provides technical assistance to the Tri-state Water Quality Council, which includes representatives from tribal, state and local governments, environmental groups, and industry. To set the stage for this plan, the Council facilitated a border agreement between Idaho and Montana to protect lake water quality, with help from Rice. The border agreement sets nutrient targets and apportions responsibility for meeting targets between the states. "EPA has been critical to the Council's efforts – Chuck Rice understands the issues and political realities," says Ruth Watkins, Executive Director of the Tri-state Water Quality Council.

An important outcome of the border agreement is that EPA recently approved a TMDL for Lake Pend Oreille that sets phosphorous standards. By combining the border agreement with the lake management plan, the states successfully finished this portion of the project. Says Rice, "Lake Pend Oreille is the centerpiece of this region's vitality and keeping it healthy is important to the economy and quality of life in the adjoining areas of Idaho, Washington, and Montana."

Assisting Tribes

In Washington, some miles downstream from Lake Pend Oreille, Rice is EPA's Project Manager for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing of the Box Canyon Dam Hydroelectric Project on the Pend Oreille River. A portion of the Box Canyon Project discharges to the Kalispel Tribe Reservation. Working with the Kalispel Tribe and the Washington Department of Ecology, EPA developed a water quality certification for this project, one of few water quality certifications for hydropower projects issued by EPA nationally. The certification requires designing and getting a plan underway to return Calispell Creek flow to a near-natural state. This will protect water quality and designated beneficial uses.

"In Northern Idaho we are isolated from government agencies, and it's hard to get people involved. Having EPA nearby is such a plus."

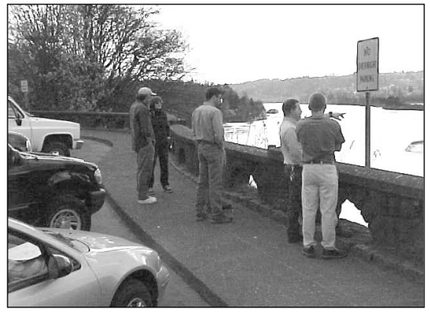
Ruth Watkins,
Executive Director
Tri-State Water Quality Council

Improving Surface Water Quality

Last year, Alan Henning began a collaborative, two-year mercury monitoring project to support the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) in developing a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for mercury and other pollutants in the Willamette Basin. A TMDL establishes allowable loadings or other parameters for a water body. The mercury monitoring project is critical to the TMDL and will help ensure its completion in late 2003. The TMDL will set allowable pollutant discharges for mercury so water quality standards can be met. The TMDL will also reduce people's exposure to mercury from eating fish. Henning set up a field workshop, organized a three-day tour of the Willamette Basin, and discussed sampling with stakeholders. This effort helped solidify working relationships and kick the project off to a productive start.

Henning's Eugene location helped him easily build relationships with local contacts – he could attend local meetings, assist with field work, or discuss pressing concerns in person. As a result, several project and laboratory experts at EPA and ODEQ are actively moving this project forward. For example, EPA's Manchester Laboratory (in Kitsap County, Washington, across Puget Sound from Seattle) and the Office of Environmental Assessment (in EPA's Regional Office in Seattle) are coordinating sample reporting with ODEQ's Portland Laboratory. Their regular interaction has helped foster a positive working relationship.

"Alan Henning was totally engaged in making this project happen," says Jared Rubin, Willamette Basin Coordinator, ODEQ. "He helped find funding, brought in critical staff, and helped with logistical hurdles."



EPA and State staff visit a Willamette Basin mercury monitoring site. Data from this site will assist in developing TMDL allocations.

Strengthening Watershed Management

Alan Henning has also helped develop the Little Applegate Watershed Management Plan. This plan will help people in Oregon's Rogue Basin apply land management practices that meet TMDL and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) fisheries requirements. Due out this spring, the plan is aimed at the regulated community. It combines and simplifies steps for meeting Endangered Species and Clean Water Act requirements. The work will result in protecting fish species and meeting water quality standards for temperature.

Helping Ideas Take Root

"Out here in Pocatello, Idaho, I'm able to move ideas into action," says Sue Skinner. "I help eliminate the mystery on environmental matters and work with stakeholders to set priorities from an ecosystem perspective." Skinner's duties range considerably. She provides guidance on the Eastern Michaud Flats Superfund cleanup, helps the cities of Pocatello and Chubbuck with groundwater issues, and is involved with a TMDL for the American Falls reservoir and other waters within the Shoshone-Bannock Indian Reservation.

Says Roger Chase, Pocatello City Mayor, "without a doubt, it's better to have EPA in town, rather than far away. Our city benefits from the hands-on knowledge of Sue Skinner." Mayor Chase says that Skinner has helped Pocatello on storm water projects, air quality issues, and Brownfields. He says Pocatello is making better environmental progress due to EPA's presence.

"Place-based staff's work with our regulatory programs such as the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and Stormwater is hugely valuable. Place-based staff quickly respond to complaints in Indian country and give a face to the Federal bureaucracy."

Mike Bussell,
Associate Director
Office of Water

Increasing Direct Seeding to Improve Air and Water Quality

Christine Kelly has also helped farmers and agriculture agencies increase direct seeding of fields. This approach reduces or eliminates fallow fields and the need for plowing, which considerably reduces both wind and water erosion and thereby improves air and water quality. Direct seeding can also reduce or eliminate field burning, which reduces air pollution. Furthermore, it leads to greater soil moisture, better soil health, and increased carbon sequestration, all of which help address air and water problems and lead to overall ecosystem improvements. During the past five years, Kelly's efforts have contributed to direct seeding of more than 60,000 acres in Umatilla County. Umatilla County is particularly important for these practices because it is a major agricultural area in Oregon. With more than 700,000 acres of agricultural land, Umatilla County is Oregon's largest wheat producing county and Oregon's second largest agriculture producing county. Several stream reaches in the Umatilla Basin are listed as "water quality limited" for sediment, turbidity, and aquatic habitat. Direct seeding will help improve water quality.

"I'm a big fan of the place-based approach – place-based staff make excellent consultants who can identify what will and won't work on the ground. I hope place-based staff will be available in the future to work with all media programs on high-priority projects, including air."

Barbara McAllister,
Director
Office of Air

Managing Agricultural Burning and Particulates

In Oregon, Christine Kelly is working with agricultural and rural communities to address a variety of ecosystem and human health concerns. This year, Kelly helped Union County greatly improve its agricultural burning program. Addressing smoke in Union County is important for a number of reasons. First, because Union County is in a valley in the Blue Mountains, smoke is often trapped, increasing human exposure to airborne particulates. Second, La Grande, the County's largest community, is a designated non-attainment area for particulates. And, third, the County is upwind of the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area, a Class I airshed that is easily affected by smoke from field burning. To deal with these issues, Kelly provided technical guidance to the County that helped lead to revising the local smoke management ordinance and adopting a direct seed program in Union County.

Farmers and agency personnel visit a field of canola, an alternative crop used in direct seeding.

Ordinance improvements included expanding the smoke management program from a three-month to a year-round program, extending burning fees to propane burning, improving forecasting methods, and using real-time air quality data to reduce burning. Kelly also initiated a local health advisory, helped create a centralized call-in center to coordinate smoke sources, worked with the National Weather Service to improve forecast information, and assisted with setting up real-time air quality monitoring. Real-time data will be posted on the County's website to help residents and farmers respond to pollution. Since this work began, fewer smoke intrusions have occurred in populated areas and citizen complaints have dramatically decreased.

Protecting Groundwater

Skinner has also been instrumental in protecting groundwater in the City of Chubbuck. With her assistance, the City obtained funding to develop groundwater protection protocols and study groundwater vulnerability. This work is important because both Pocatello and Chubbuck rely on a sole source aquifer for drinking water.

In addition, Skinner has helped Chubbuck develop best management practices for storm water. Such practices will eventually enable the City to protect the aquifer through local decision-making. Says Steve Smart, City of Chubbuck Public Works Director, "Sue is an excellent resource – she helps us contact the right people at EPA."

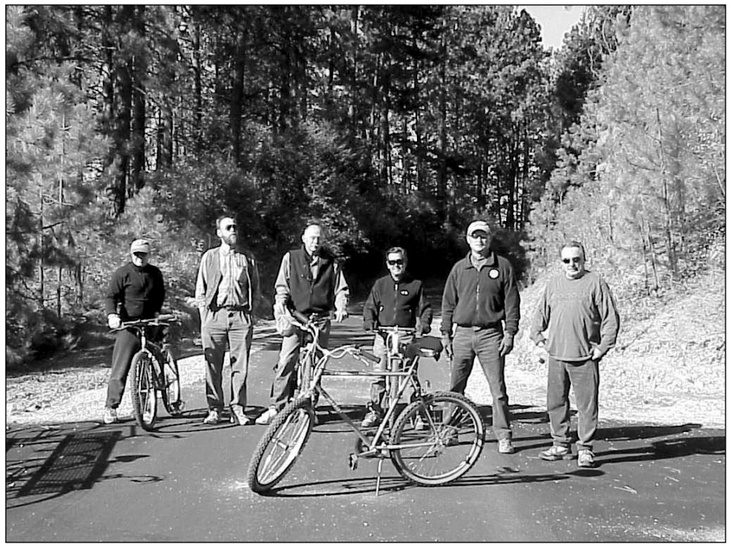
"You don't build trust by visiting a community a few times a year – we firmly believe in the place-based approach."

Paula Jones,
Project Coordinator
Three-Rivers Resource Conservation and Development Council
Pocatello, Idaho

Sue Skinner (middle left) describes the advantages of applying for stormwater permits through intergovernmental partnerships. Skinner is a valuable link between EPA and newly regulated communities needing Phase II storm water permits.

Improving Local Economies, Cleaning Up Sites

Cami Grandinetti and Dick Martindale (who worked on loan to EPA from the Panhandle Health District) have been paving the way for environmental action that will improve local economies in and around Kellogg and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. This year, they worked with the State of Idaho and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe to transform a contaminated railway into a 72-mile trail for hiking and biking. The $40 million project is funded by Union Pacific Railroad and is scheduled to be done in summer 2003. In addition to cleaning up contaminated sites along the railway, the project involves building or repairing 30 bridges and constructing solar-powered bathrooms. A boon to tourism and local economies, the trail runs through nine communities in three counties.



The rails-to-trails team celebrates progress on the new trail.

Expediting Superfund Cleanups

Martindale also played a vital role in releasing the final $360 million Record of Decision for the Coeur d'Alene Basin Superfund site, which enables cleanup to begin this year. The Record of Decision outlines a 30-year strategy to protect human health and the environment from historical mine waste. EPA's work will include removing contaminated soils from 1,000 residential yards, remediating 4,500 acres of wetlands to provide safe waterfowl habitat, and cleaning up recreational sites along the Coeur d'Alene River. By doing this work, EPA will significantly reduce health risks, especially for children under seven years old.

To achieve results in the Coeur d'Alene Basin, Martindale had to garner support from states, tribes, and federal agencies. He participated in more than 200 public meetings, helped respond to more than 3,000 public comments, visited citizens door-to-door, and was in the field twice a week. Says Martindale, "all environmental work occurs locally."

"Work on the Coeur d'Alene Basin has demanded the presence of place-based staff," says Jack O'Brien, a citizen in Hayden, Idaho. "There is no way action would have occurred without Martindale's ability to attend meetings and understand the history behind the issues." Says O'Brien, "we trust Martindale's perception of the issues."

"When on-the-ground cleanup is needed, place-based staff can move more dirt. They can deal with scores of local issues and concerns, which we could never handle from Seattle."

Mike Gearheard,
Director
Environmental Cleanup
Office